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SUBJECT Admiral Stansfield Turner Discusses Falklands Crisis

CHRIS WALLACE: As we've been reporting this morning, the fighting in the South Atlantic has intensified, with several incidents overnight.

Retired Admiral Stansfield Turner, former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, has been helping us analyze just what is going on around the Falklands.

Admiral, welcome back.

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: Thank you, Chris.

WALLACE: We have gotten very contradictory reports over the weekend as to just what is going on in the Falklands from Argentina and Britain.

ADMIRAL TURNER: That's not abnormal in a war situation. There are inadvertent errors of reporting, overenthusiasm. Sometimes people try to take propaganda advantage by misreporting.

WALLACE: Which side do you believe?

ADMIRAL TURNER: The British have got to be the most accurate. First, because they really know what's happening. Their planes either come back or they don't come back. They have reporters on those ships, so they know one day the truth will come out. Britain's an open democracy. They cannot afford to appear to have the government officially deceiving their people. So what they say, they really believe.

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WALLACE: From what you've heard so far, how would you rate the performance of the two countries?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, the British performance is very good. The Argentinian performance is just very, very bad, militarily.

WALLACE: Let me ask you about that. We had this incident that apparently happened late yesterday in which the General Belgrano (?), a cruiser, was sunk outside the war zone. Were you surprised that the Argentines would expose their ship that way?

ADMIRAL TURNER: What was it doing there? What in the world could it accomplish? The British fleet is somewhere up over here, certainly to the east and north of the Falklands. It was just exposing itself unnecessarily. There was nothing, with six-inch guns, that it could do for the Argentinian cause down there. It was silly to be at sea.

WALLACE: How about these two Argentine patrol boats, one of which was apparently sunk and one damaged inside the war zone northeast of the Falklands?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Now, they're the boats that last week snuck into the Falklands harbor here. I thought they were one of the major threats that the Argentinians posed to the ships out here. They could be a threat only if they dashed out at high speed and closed the major British ships. They were apparently caught just tooling around out here, fishing or doing something ridiculous.

WALLACE: On the other hand, what have the British really accomplished? I mean there are still 10,000 Argentine soldiers on the Falkland Islands.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Oh, the British are winning the war, but victory is nowhere in sight. Pushing those 10,000 troops off the islands is a big task that they haven't undertaken as yet, and don't, I believe, indicate they're going to at this time.

WALLACE: All right. If you're in charge of the British fleet, what do you do next?

ADMIRAL TURNER: You keep the exclusion zone excluding. You keep everybody out of there. Then you keep harassing these islands. You keep bombarding them from ships. You keep dropping small contingents of Marines by helicopter onto remote areas. You make it miserable and tough for those defenders. You can't push them off there yet.

WALLACE: I was going to say, why not the all-out assault?

ADMIRAL TURNER: They don't have enough troops there at this time. It's a tough proposition to move in from the sea in any circumstances. But when you have a numerical disadvantage such as theirs, I don't think it's an advisable step.

WALLACE: They've apparently got about 1500 Marines and the Argentines have about 10,000 men on the island.

How many would you need? Even when they get their reinforcements in two weeks, they're still going to be outnumbered about two-to-one.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes. But I think then, when those reinforcements come down, if they're really serious about this, they'll establish two or three or four outposts on here, decide which one is the best or which several are the best, and begin beefing them up and moving in on the central point of the Argentinian defense at Port Stanley.

WALLACE: All right, let's switch sides. Now you're running the Argentine army and navy. What do you do?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I would certainly pull my navy back and hold it. But the thing we haven't seen from the Argentines is a major attack by their land-based airpower here from the mainland. It's time that they got a 30- or a 40-plane raid going, and certainly attacked those British destroyers that are right here within their range alongside the coastline, and made an effort, if they can do it, to get out here to hit the carriers.

WALLACE: The U.S. announced over the weekend that it is going to apply economic and military sanctions against Argentina. Japan has also come on on the British side. What impact will that have?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think that's going to turn the tide in the long run. I think that's the most important development of this past week. It tells the Argentinians that all the major powers are lining up against them, all their major trading partners: the European community the week before; this week, the United States and Japan. It's a bad sign for Argentina.

WALLACE: What do you expect over these next few days, more of these hit-and-run attacks, or does Argentina have to try some major all-out offensive to turn the war around? They're getting picked to death right now.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes. You will see more of the hit-and-run attacks by the British. And we just have to wait and see if the Argentinians can pull together a major air raid on the British fleet. That's about the only card they've left.

WALLACE: Admiral Turner, again, thank you.